

## **Undocumented Workers Allowed Workplace Injury Benefits**

This year, The Virginia General Assembly made changes to Virginia's workers' compensation laws that are significant to all undocumented workers and their employers. In January 1999, the Virginia Supreme Court, the state's highest court, made a decision that prevented illegal alien workers from being covered by workers' compensation. Beginning in April 2000, however, undocumented workers are eligible for workers' compensation benefits when they are injured because of their work.

Under Virginia's workers' compensation system, employers must provide benefits to workers injured because of their work, including medical and wage-replacement benefits. These benefits are free to employees. To receive benefits, injured employees must notify their supervisors immediately when they are hurt. Their employers are then required to provide them with a list of at least three doctors, from which the employees must select one to receive medical attention. If an employer does not offer this "panel" of doctors, the employee may go to a doctor of his or her choosing. In exchange for this straightforward and simple procedure, employees may not bring lawsuits against their employers for their injuries.

Virginia's workers' compensation system is administered by the Workers' Compensation Commission in Richmond. To ensure the right to full benefits, employees must file a claim with the Commission. Claim forms are available from the Commission, phone number (877) 664-2566, or from an attorney.

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